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TABLE OF CONTENTS

An Elephant Token Never Forgets — Forgery. Eric P. Newman	163
Book Reviews	168, 186
Australian Decimal Coinage. W. H. Bradfield	169
Report of the Librarian	171
Silver Dollars in the Treasury	172
Notes & Queries	175
Coinage Reports	179
Calendar of Future Numismatic Events	179
Far East Scout Medal; Project Mercury Medal	181
How to Win in NCW	182
Victoria Regina, 1837-1901. Charles G. Colver	183
Obituaries	186
Sculptor's Monogram on the Kennedy Half Dollar	188
Currency in Malawi, Rhodesia, and Zambia	188
Orders and Medals. Jack Sweetman	189
Colorado Springs Offers Site	192
Tribute to Asher H. Leatherman. Arthur Sipe	192
Status of A.N.A. Headquarters Project	193
CSNS 1965 Convention	194
New or Recent Issues. Ernst Kraus	195
Unkept Thoughts on the Houston Convention	197
Battle of New Orleans Medal	198
A.N.A. Building Fund	199
Society of Medalists: 70th Issue; American Hall of Fame Medal	205
Club News	206
Audio-Visual Education Committee	206
Executive Secretary's Report	218

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Impact Dies in Modern Counterfeiting

AN ELEPHANT TOKEN NEVER FORGETS — FORGERY

By

ERIC P. NEWMAN, A.N.A. No. 4624

WITH deadly "impact," forgeries of coins collected primarily by Americans continue to emanate from London sources. The new crop of die struck copies of old coins are of highly deceptive quality. First the fake Oak Tree shilling was reported¹, then the bogus St. Patrick farthing in silver², then the 1787 *Auctori Plebis* counterfeit³, then the spurious Franklin Press token⁴, and now a false London Elephant token. How many more are there? Are they going to be stopped before the deluge? Anyone who knowingly buys such coins for any sum whatsoever only encourages a continuation of forgery and undermines numismatics, as apparently no counterfeiting law seems to have been violated in the case of these particular coins selected for forgery.

Other forgeries undoubtedly would have been on their way but the forger seems to have been diverted to the easier task of producing cut and counterstamped West Indies pieces from genuine Spanish Colonial silver coins.

The ordinary London Elephant half-penny, once known as the African halfpenny, was readily obtainable at a nominal price until there were more coin collectors than elephants. Then it became sufficiently scarce to merit being forged.

Within the last three years a "new variety" of a London Elephant half-penny has come to light. Charles Wilson Peck in his authoritative study of the technical varieties of English copper coinage⁵ did not know of it. Even though unknown in British or American collections, a new die variety always can be discovered and therefore the "new variety" should be skepti-

cally treated as genuine until proved false. Both the obverse and the reverse dies of the "new variety" are new, yet both correspond in elements and in placement to the dies of the most common London Elephant token, known as Peck No. 503 and routinely illustrated in catalogs. The obverse has the figure of an elephant standing on ground and has a toothed border but no legend. The reverse contains the arms of the City of London on a shield and the circular legend **GOD: PRESERVE: LONDON:** with a toothed border. It contains a six pointed star or mullet under the shield.

Related Dies

Before explaining how the "new variety" differs from the known one, an examination of other related dies is necessary.

In addition to the reverse on the Peck No. 503, there is another reverse die with an X joining the inside corners of St. George's cross (No. 501), a third reverse with the dagger in the second quadrant instead of the first, and having no star (No. 502); and a fourth reverse with only the legend **LON * DON *** (No. 500).

On the obverse of Peck No. 503 the elephant's trunk is close to the toothed border, while in the other obverse die the trunk is more than a trunk's thickness distant from the border (Nos. 500, 501, and 502). These same two obverse dies are used on the New England and Carolina elephant tokens dated 1694. The obverse, with the trunk distant from the border, is found combined with the Carolina reverse having an uncorrected second E in **PROPRIETERS** (Crosby, plate IX, No. 1). The obverse with the trunk

¹Eric P. Newman, "A Dangerous Oak Tree Shilling Copy Appears," *The Numismatist* (February, 1963), Vol. 76, p. 147.

²Eric P. Newman, "A Snake Breeds a St. Patrick Farthing," *The Numismatist* (May, 1963), Vol. 76, p. 619.

³Eric P. Newman, "Auctori Plebis — Without Any Authority Whatsoever," *The Numismatist* (November, 1964), Vol. 77, p. 1492.

⁴Robert A. Vlack, "Payable at the Franklin Press — Or Is It?", *The Numismatist* (January, 1965), Vol. 78, p. 16.

⁵Charles Wilson Peck, *English Coppers, Tin and Bronze Coins in the British Museum* (London, 1960), p. 139.

close to the border is combined with both the corrected Carolina (Crosby, plate IX, No. 2) and the New England reverse (Crosby, plate IX, No. 3). Therefore, both known obverse dies are found on pieces with American legends. The "new variety" is not.

Numismatic References

The earliest numismatic reference to Elephant tokens published by Thoresby⁶ in 1713 relates the London pieces to the reign of Charles II (1660-65) while the date 1694 on the American pieces falls in the reign of William and Mary. However, the American pieces were not known to Thoresby. Martin-Leake in 1726⁷ copied Thoresby's chronology, and although enlarging the text on Elephant tokens in his second edition in 1745, still did not know of the American pieces.

reason for the use of the London Elephant tokens have come to light.

Differences in "New Variety"

The "new variety" differs from — but is similar to — the well known London Elephant token (No. 503) in the following major particulars:

Obverse differences: (1) In the "new variety" the inside of the top lobe of the ear comes to a sharp point, whereas in the known type the lobe has an open, sweeping loop. (2) In the "new variety" the forepart of the right hind leg has a straight outline, whereas in the known type there is a knee joint with a 60 degree change of direction in the outline of that forepart. (3) In the "new variety" the inside outline of the skin flap on the base of the elephant's tusk angles 45 degrees down to the



Genuine token



However, the Pembroke plates published in London in 1746 but prepared about 1720⁸ illustrated the Carolina Elephant token in Part 4, Table 14, for the first time. Snelling⁹ in 1769 commented on both the London and Carolina pieces stating that the elephant die "is remaining in the Tower." The die was not there when an inventory of dies was published in 1910¹⁰. No facts as to the date or

right, whereas in the known type it hangs like a catenary curve.

Reverse differences: (1) In the "new variety" a continuation of a line drawn through the dots of the left top colon falls just to the right of the right bottom colon, whereas in the known type it intersects the second R in PRESERVE. (2) In the "new variety" a continuation of a line drawn through the dots of the right top

⁶Ralph Thoresby, *Museum Thoresbyanum* (London, 1713), p. 379, being part of his *Ducatus Leodiensis* (London, 1715).

⁷Stephen Martin-Leake, *An Historical Account of English Money* (London, 1726, misdated 1626), p. 120.

⁸For an explanation of the background of the Pembroke plates, see Eric P. Newman, *The Secret of the Good Samaritan Shilling*, American Numismatic Society Numismatic Notes and Monographs No. 142 (New York, 1959), p. 3.

⁹Thomas Snelling, *Miscellaneous Views, etc.* (London, 1769), p. 39 and plate 4, No. 23.

¹⁰William J. Hocking, *Catalog of the Coins, Tokens, Medals, Dies and Seals in the Royal Mint* (London, 1910), Vol. 2.

colon falls between the left bottom colon and L, whereas in the known type it intersects the first o in LONDON. (3) In the "new variety" the base of P has an irregular bifurcation sharply cut into the die, whereas in the known type the base of the P is horizontal and bifurcation to various degrees results from the radial expansion of the planchet during striking, leaving a rising slope between the base outline and the bifurcation. (4) In the "new variety" the base of the first R has a sharply cut die bifurcation, whereas in the known type there is a rising slope from the base to the bifurcated elements. (5) In the "new variety" the cross is not lightly striated, as it is in the known type. (6) In the "new variety" many of the teeth on the border are sharply pointed on the inside edge and are distant from the

to America in the last three years.

The accompanying table raises a "red" warning flag in several important particulars. How can there be a brilliant red proof made in the 17th century? How can each coin have a different obverse-reverse relationship if the "new variety" is a normal production from dies fixed in position? How can reddish areas be found on coins, purportedly 250 years old, which also have very dark areas, unless artificially colored or tampered with? How can six of a "new variety" simultaneously appear after almost three centuries? Why do worn coins have square edges? Why do five of the coins have almost identical weights when the previously known pieces vary substantially in weight, whether in the thick or thin planchet categories?



Forged token

letters, whereas on the known type the teeth are all blunt on the inside and close to the letters. (7) The placement of the teeth relative to the parts of the letters differs.

Obverse similarities: The size and shape of the elephant is virtually identical on both pieces.

Reverse similarities: (1) The legend is in virtually the identical position relative to the shield on both pieces. (2) The letters of the legend are in virtually identical positions relative to one another on both pieces. (3) The size and shape of the London arms is virtually identical on both pieces.

No Safety in Numbers

The writer has seen six examples of the "new variety" which separately have worked their way from London

From the foregoing the reader cannot avoid suspecting the "new variety." The problem is to analyze the evidence and determine what has occurred.

The Bifurcation Impossibility

The "new variety" has the base of certain of its letters (particularly the PR in PRESERVE) deliberately cut as bifurcations. This is positive proof of a forgery when the same letters on the dies of known varieties of the same style of coin have flat bases and such other varieties have natural bifurcation. Only letters near the circumference of a coin are subject to such a conclusion, and all lettering on London Elephant tokens is so located.

It is well known that in striking

coins without a collar, in presses of unregulated pressure, the planchet expands radially toward the outside because of the force of the blow on the face. The areas near the circumference move outward more than areas near the center. The movement causes the top or any outwardly restrained portion of a letter to fill in solidly.

The area of metal in a planchet under any letter with a long upright in a radial position starts to rise to fill the die recess but before the complete fill-in has taken place, the metal under the base has moved slightly outward. The top parts of the serifs at the base of letters in the die act to restrain the metal near them, and therefore the metal cannot move outward as easily in those portions. Thus the center of the base of a letter does not fill in to the extent that the sides of the serifs do, because the center of the base of a letter with a radial upright is far away from something to stop the outward movement. This results in the bottom of such letter appearing split into two prongs which join a little higher up on the upright of a letter. The portion between the prongs takes the appearance of a glacier sweeping up to mountains. If the pressure were sufficient this would not occur, but sufficient pressure in 17th century minting techniques might have broken the dies too soon or spread the coin too much.

There is no bifurcation at the base of the letters on the actual reverse die from which genuine Elephant tokens were struck, even though bifurcation customarily resulted on the genuine tokens themselves, as heretofore explained. However, if a false die were made from a genuine token by impact, then the false die would improperly have bifurcation. When an engraver attempts by hand to sharpen the de-

tail of such a false die he cannot readily reproduce the rising sweep of the natural metal flow into the bifurcation. In the "new variety" no attempt was made to create a natural sweep and the two prongs in each of the bifurcated letters PR were cut with sharp sides, proving that the original letter punches were not used to make the die from which the "new variety" was struck.

Letter punches which have forked bases sometimes have been used to avoid natural bifurcation in other coins, but no punches used for the other letters on the die of the "new variety" of Elephant tokens were of that style.

Forged Impact Dies

Originally the fundamental requirement for making impact dies was the destruction of a genuine coin or two. The application of impact die making to counterfeiting apparently started in the forging of English gold sovereigns because the genuine pieces had a premium value far above their intrinsic metal value. It was unimportant how many sovereigns were destroyed in making a die as the gold was salvageable. If a red hot piece of soft steel were struck with a cold coin in a drop forge, or by other means using adequate impact force, the design of one side of the coin would be forced into the steel. The design of the other side could be similarly impressed on hot steel by using a second coin. Fortunately, the impact usually does not leave all portions of the impression in steel clear and strong, but the position and size of all parts of the coin are correct as if done by a hubbing or transfer process from hard metal. Any weakness in the design or lettering in the impact dies needs some touching up by hand engraving before the steel die

Relationship of dies in degrees clockwise if turned upon vertical axis		
Weight in Grains	Condition	
134 $\frac{3}{8}$	Proof	190
133 $\frac{1}{2}$	V.F.	10
134	F.	290
133 $\frac{1}{4}$	V.G.	350
133 $\frac{5}{8}$	Abt. V.G.	165
199	V.F.	305

Surface	Edge	Color
Perfect	Square	Brilliant red
Line nicks	Square	Red and brown
Line nicks	Square	Splotchy red and black
Line nicks	Square	Dark brown
Line nicks	Square	Olive and red
Line nicks	Rough	Brown with reddish letters

is hardened, and in doing so, variations and defects occur. The finer the impact, the less engraving is necessary; the finer the engraving, the more difficult the exposure of the fraud.

If a coin is too rare to destroy, impact dies can be made without harming the coin. This could be accomplished by making a separate high quality electrotype of each side of the coin. Each such electrotype is built up on its back by prolonged electrolytic immersion so that it has sufficient body to be used in the impact process. Electrotypes, by reason of their method of production, lose some detail, and therefore produce weaker impressions when subsequently used to make impact dies.

If a coin is inexpensive, there is little loss in destroying it in order to make dies for forgeries in other metals. For example, if a coin were of hard metal such as the 1943 U.S. steel cent, superb impact dies can be and apparently have been made for the purpose of striking false 1943 cents in copper.¹¹ The St. Patrick farthing in silver² is from an impact die made either by destroying a copper farthing of little value or from an electrotype. A gold St. Patrick farthing could be forged as easily. If a particular die combination is rare and the identical dies are common in separate coins, then impact dies can produce a rare coin forgery by destroying two common coins. For example, a U.S. 1909 San Francisco mint VDB cent might be struck from an impact die made from the obverse of a routine 1909 San Francisco mint cent and an impact die made from the reverse of a common 1909 Philadelphia mint VDB cent.

No inference should be drawn from the foregoing that the author has had occasion to test these procedures personally. In addition, the reader is not to conclude that the foregoing should be taken as suggestions worth acting upon, since there are counterfeiting laws which stand in the way of such fraud. The reason these thoughts are expressed is to alert the reader so he can protect himself, realize the seriousness of apathy toward such practices, help crush their sources, and save numismatics from

being degraded and discredited with a flood of forgeries.

Quantities of forged sovereigns and other modern gold selling at a premium and made chiefly by the impact process are carefully described by Alfred Dieffenbacher.¹² Other forged American pieces made by the impact die process have been described by John J. Ford Jr. and Don Taxay.¹³

Summary

The reason for every difference between the "new variety" and the known variety of the London Elephant token should now be clear. The ear lobe, the right hind foot, and the skin flap are all hand engraved for the purpose of strengthening the impression made by the impact die. Only one elephant punch was used to make genuine elephant dies in the 17th century, and there would be no need to hand engrave parts of a genuine die in those parts where the elephant punch could be reused for that purpose.

On the reverse, the identical position of all lettering with respect to itself and to the shield cannot possibly occur both on the "new variety" and on the known die, because individual letter punches were used to make the dies in the 17th century and would not and could not be so perfectly duplicated in position on two genuine dies. The P and R in known varieties clearly have a square base from which the bifurcation flows, while the bifurcation in the "new variety" is artificially cut into the impact die. The colons were weak in the impact die, and when strengthened by repunching, they were straightened out somewhat and thrown out of line. The striations in the cross of the known variety were not deep enough in the original coin to show up at all in an impact die. The toothed border did not show up well so the engraver cut a new border with a tool shaped differently from the one with which the originals were made.

The effort to which the forger went in the "new variety" of Elephant token is not justified financially. Perhaps it is practice for "better" things to come. It must be justified to a great extent by the personal satisfaction in seeing others duped. It is a

¹¹Don Taxay, *Counterfeit, Mis-Struck and Unofficial U. S. Coins* (New York, 1963) pp. 48, 66.

¹²Alfred Dieffenbacher, *Counterfeit Gold Coins* (Montreal, 1963).

¹³John J. Ford Jr., and Don Taxay, "Counterfeits of U. S. and Other Coins Reported," *The Numismatist*, Vol. 77, Nos. 1-4 incl. (January-April, 1964).

diseased mind at work. The forger or forgers are trained in modern metallurgical, mechanical, and chemical engineering methods, as well as in the engraving art. He or they are wasting those talents. After the forgeries are struck they are artificially worn and gently scarred and nicked. Then they are chemically and thermally colored with the toning "dyes" to make them appear old. One could tell, however, from the "dies" which one has the "Toni." Folly of this type must be eliminated by coöperative effort. All such pieces should be permanently defaced or destroyed. Above all, these pieces should be excluded by numismatists from any commercial traffic whatsoever.

No description or discussion of the 19th century Robinson copy of the New England Elephant token, the 19th century Bolen copy of the Carolina Elephant token, or the recent Capitol Medals copy of the Carolina Elephant token has been included because they are imitations readily dis-

tinguishable from the pieces under discussion. The type of the uncirculated Elephant token advertised in the October, 1964, *Numismatic Scrapbook Magazine*, p. 2730, is not stated and has not been examined.

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BOOK REVIEW

A Catalog of Modern World Coins by R. S. Yeoman, 6th edition, Whitman Publishing Co., Racine, Wis., 1964, board covers, 512 pp., illus., \$4.00.

The revised "brown book" is out, and the growing group of foreign coin collectors is buying it to the extent that the larger than usual first printing sold out in about two weeks. Quite a few changes have taken place in world coinage during the last two years, and more than a few prices of older coins needed to be brought in line with current demands. Without increasing the size or price of the book, Whitman managed to make considerable rearrangement, add the newest coins and include others recently brought to light. Added illustrations and information expanded the Afghanistan series from 3 to 9 pages, and a dozen coins, with illustrations, were added to the Israel section. A chart was included for reading and translating dates on Ethiopian coins. It was necessary to make space for these and other additions, but few collectors will miss the early issues such as Leopold I of Belgium and German coins prior to 1871. We understand that these German state coins will be added to the new book, covering the period of 1750 to 1850, now in preparation by Whitman.

Prices of many of the minor coins and most gold remain unchanged, but there are exceptions such as the Maundy sets of England, which about tripled from the fifth edition, and all coins of Lithuania. The 1909 Kiao Chau 10¢ piece advanced from \$5 to \$12.50. Most of the crown size and commemorative coins and proof sets moved up considerably, as illustrated by the following random examples: Austria, No. 3 commemorative crown, \$37.50 to \$100; Bermuda 1959 crown, \$4 to \$12.50; Kweichow, 1928 automobile dollar, \$22.50 to \$40; Cuba, souvenir peso of 1897, \$10 to \$30; Queen Victoria, gothic crown of 1847, \$20 to \$100; the British 1953 coronation proof set, \$15 to \$35; and the New Zealand 1935 Waitangi crown, \$125 to \$225. A very few price reductions were noted, such as No. 30 of Tibet, \$12.50 to \$7.50.

With its illustration, convenient arrangement of countries in alphabetical order, index and listing of denominations by countries, and up to date retail prices, the book is a storehouse of information for collectors and students alike. Priced at \$4.00, the new "brown book" may be purchased from most coin dealers and in many book stores. — GLENN S.